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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4693
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0747
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3348
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 3326
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0516
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1499
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7570
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0615
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STATE FOR EAP/MTS, INR/GGI AND INR/EAP

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SUBJECT: WEST IRIAN JAYA PROVINCE RENAMED "WEST PAPUA"

¶1. (U) The Indonesian Department of Home Affairs issued a directive on April 18 officially changing the name of West Irian Jaya province to West Papua ("Papua Barat" in Bahasa Indonesia). Post reporting will henceforth reflect the new usage.

¶2. (U) The Home Affairs directive provides a transition period of one year during which time the new name as well as the old will be officially acceptable. After April 18, 2008, only the new name will be used. The political leaders in both Papua and West Papua provinces are on board with the change, which has been under discussion since well before direct elections for governor on March 10, 2006. At an April 18 summit in Biak, Papua Governor Barnabas Suebu, West Papua Governor Bram Atururi and the leaders of both provincial parliaments and the Papuan People's Council (Majelis Rakyat Papua) signed off on an agreement using the name West Papua for the province with its capital at Manokwari.

¶3. (U) The change will initially cause a certain amount of controversy and confusion among foreign Papua watchers. For years, "West Papua" has been a term used by some activists to describe Indonesia's half of New Guinea, and it has become associated with the separatist cause. At least one foreign academic has alleged that by bringing the term into official usage, the GOI is attempting to undermine the separatist movement.

¶4. (U) In Indonesia, however, the move is not controversial and is regarded by most as a positive step. It reflects the improving relationship between the governors of Papua and West Papua, and is part of an ongoing effort to correct West Papua's questionable legal basis, which has been in limbo since the Constitutional Court issued an ambiguous ruling on the matter in November 2004.

¶5. (U) Moreover, the old name Irian Jaya had become an anachronism. Originally designating all of former Dutch New Guinea, it was used in Sukarno's campaign to annex the territory and subsequently in the Suharto regime's strategy to integrate it into the rest of Indonesia. While some have advanced dubious claims that the name "Irian" actually exists in a local Papuan language, the generally accepted explanation is that it is an artificial acronym derived from the nationalist Bahasa Indonesia slogan, "Ikut Republik Indonesia Anti Nederlands" ("Follow the anti-Dutch Indonesian Republic"). "Jaya" simply means "great" or "victorious."

For this reason, the vast majority of indigenous Papuans welcomed then-President Abdurrachman Wahid's 1999 decision to replace "Irian Jaya" with "Papua" as the name of the province with its capital at Jayapura. The move to rename West Irian Jaya eliminates a lingering incongruity.

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